

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
 INTERVIEW WITH TIM RUSSERT ON NBC-TV PROGRAM, "MEET THE PRESS"
 PENTAGON
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MR. RUSSERT: With us now, the secretary of defense.

Mr. Secretary, thanks for joining us.

SEC. PERRY: Thank you, Tim.

MR. RUSSERT: Nine Haitians dead, a sailor -- American sailor -- injured. Is this just the beginning?

SEC. PERRY: I talked yesterday with our commanders and our troops in Haiti, including Colonel Jones, who's the commander of the Marine forces at "Cape Haitian" or Cap-Haitien. And I told them that they had a very difficult job. First of all, they're coming across. They want to be friends with the Haitians. They're delivering food. They're delivering medicine. They're there to help; they're there to be friends. But they also have a mission, and the mission is to establish security, and that's a difficult mission, and they had to stand tall for that mission and that they would have difficulties. We fully expected difficulties, and the incident we saw yesterday, I think, is just typical of what we expected to see.

MR. RUSSERT: Senator Nunn, seemed to suggest that incidents like this will only encourage Congress to set a date certain for the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Haiti. He's talking perhaps early next year. Could the administration accept that kind of position?

SEC. PERRY: I agree with Senator Nunn's assessment that it would be better for military reasons not to have a definite date set. Nevertheless, we are anxious to get this mission done and out of there. I also agree with him that certainly a minimum requirement is to be there through the parliamentary elections. It's very important, I think, that we are there to ensure fair and free parliamentary elections. So we will certainly be there into early next year. I would hope to get it wrapped -- get the military part of this mission wrapped up by then, but I would not like to have a date certain set. I think that complicates our operations.

MR. RUSSERT: The administration had been

saying that there will be 15,000 Americans in Haiti for the next six to eight months and then 3,000 Americans as part of a U.N. force through February of '96. Is that still your schedule?

SEC. PERRY: That never was exactly the schedule, Tim. Let me clarify those figures if I may. We will have about 14,000 or 15,000 troops on the ground there within a few days. In fact, we have about 13,000 as we speak. That number, as the security situation gets established, we would start to decrease. We never planned to keep 14,000 or 15,000 there at a steady level. And I would hope to have that wound up in a few months, not six or eight months. On the U.N. force, they're looking at a U.N. force of about 6,000, of which I would think fewer than half would be Americans, perhaps 2,000.

MR. RUSSERT: Senator Nunn also suggested that President Aristide go to the U.N. now and seek to lift the embargo against food, medicine so the poor people of Haiti can stop their suffering, and, two, President Aristide should now seek to call the parliament and grant amnesty to General Cedras. Do you agree with that?

SEC. PERRY: I'm not going to advise President Aristide in his actions, but let me address the substance of what Senator Nunn was saying. Now, I think it's very important -- I agree with Senator Nunn's assessment that it's very important -- that we start getting aid and relief to the Haitian people so that they're -- they see some immediate improvement in their living conditions there. We can do that, and we're already doing that. We're delivering food. We're delivering medicine. We plan to bring enough diesel fuel in to start the electrical system again. They haven't had lights in the cities now for many, many months. We want to do that for strictly military reasons, to get the lights on to improve security. So we can do a lot of things just on our own to get the situation improved in the next few weeks.

MR. RUSSERT: There's a report in The Washington Post today that the U.S. government is going to engage in rental contracts, give money to the richest families in Haiti -- the Madsens, the Mev family, families that financed the overthrow of Aristide -- and the U.S. is going to have contracts with them providing services. Does that make sense?

SEC. PERRY: I can't comment on that report. I didn't read it, and I'm not familiar with the plan that you're describing.

MR. RUSSERT: Would it be -- do you find it acceptable if it, in fact, were true?

SEC. PERRY: I don't know what the background of what is being proposed is, so I -- without knowing what that plan is, I'm reluctant to comment on it.

MR. RUSSERT: Do you think that Haiti can be permanently stable as long as General Cedras and Mr. Francois and Mr. Biamby stay in Haiti?

SEC. PERRY: I have a hard time imagining Haiti being permanently stable with or without General Cedras. It's a troubled country. It's had a history of violence and a history of instability. I think we have a good charter at establishing a reasonable level of security and stability on the island, to provide an environment on which a new government can get -- the legal government can be reestablished. From that point on, it's primarily up to them, and they will have a hard time ahead of them. But our job is not to create a new Haiti. Our job is to establish a secure environment to give the Haitians a chance to create a stable government.

MR. RUSSERT: We also want to reinstate Mr. Aristide as president. Last week, there was an article in The New York Times that we were tapping his phone over the last few months. Is it appropriate to ask American boys to put their life on the line for someone we have so little faith in that we're tapping his phone?

SEC. PERRY: Tim, I'm not going to comment about any of our intelligence operations. So I think I'm just going to pass that one by.

MR. RUSSERT: You don't deny that we were tapping his phone?

SEC. PERRY: I neither confirm nor deny it.

MR. RUSSERT: Bob?

MR. WOODWARD: Mr. Secretary, it's no secret that in the Clinton administration you had your doubts, you were hesitant about this kind of operation, that the generals and the admirals and the military people in the services say, "What's the mission? Why are we doing this? This is very nontraditional." What caused you to go along with it?

SEC. PERRY: I don't want to confirm the premise of your statement, Bob. I will say this, though, that I have been concerned and the -- and our military have had a very clear picture from the beginning of the problems, the difficulties, what you might call the downsides, the risks, of trying to perform this operation. We're very conscious of those. And part of my job, part of General

Shalikashvili's job, was to explain to all of the other policymakers what these downsides and what these risks were. So in the discussion that's taken place within the administration for months before this operation, part of our role was laying out the downsides, explaining the risks, explaining how many troops are going to have to be involved and for how long. And we did that. We did that very carefully.

MR. WOODWARD: Do you think it's sound to have done what we have done? I mean, if you were president, would you have done it?

SEC. PERRY: Yes.

MR. WOODWARD: You would have?

SEC. PERRY: Yes.

MR. WOODWARD: Just like we handled it?

SEC. PERRY: I had -- you know, had the opportunity to advise the president. I won't tell you specifically what my advice to him was, but I think the president -- on the basis of all the input, the judgments he got, the advice he got, I believe he made the right decision.

MR. WOODWARD: What do you say to the troops? Do you say: "Look, this maybe is an ill-defined mission. We're ordered to do it. Let's just hold our nose and obey orders"? Or are you able to give them a theory and explain, "Look, this is why you're doing it"?

SEC. PERRY: This is not a theoretical question, Bob. I visited our troops last Monday, last Wednesday, last Saturday before the entry, and I visited them again yesterday in Haiti. I've talked with thousands of our troops. I've talked with the commanders. I've explained to them what their mission is, the importance of their mission. And I think they have -- I think they understand it, and I think they're enthusiastic about it.

MR. WOODWARD: There are reports that President Clinton was somewhat on the sidelines of Haitian policy for a long time and that Tony Lake, the national security advisor, was the engine driving it. Is that correct?

SEC. PERRY: That is not correct. The president was fully and completely engaged in discussions of Haiti, going back many, many months.

MR. WOODWARD: When you had those discussions, did the issue of domestic political concerns ever come up?

SEC. PERRY: To the extent they'd come up, Bob, it was a recognition by the president, for example, that there could be political downsides to

this mission. His decision to go ahead with this mission was based, I believe, with the judgment that it probably would be a political liability and that nevertheless he thought it was the right thing to do and he went ahead and did it anyway. So the rap that this was done for some sort of domestic political benefit, I think, is clearly wrong.

MR. HUNT: Don't you think though, sir, it would have been better to have gotten the approval of Congress for something of this magnitude?

SEC. PERRY: There are interesting constitutional questions here, and I am not a constitutional lawyer.

MR. HUNT: But as a matter of public policy, wouldn't it have been better?

SEC. PERRY: I think, as a matter of public policy, it is better -- always better -- to have the Congress and the public supporting a major military mission like this. It's a different question to say, "Should you go to Congress and ask them to make a resolution for it?" That I don't think was necessary. But I do think it was important to build up public support and to build up congressional support. We've tried to do that. I personally worked, talking with many congressman, explaining what we're doing, why we're doing it, and soliciting their support for it.

MR. HUNT: Let me go back to Bob's earlier question, and that is that the -- it seems to me over the last 12 years that the United States' experience in nation-building, if you will, has not been a very successful one, from Lebanon to Somalia. Why are you more optimistic that it'll be different this time?

SEC. PERRY: I don't see our role here as nation-building. I see our role here as one of establishing a stability and security in Haiti and creating an environment in which the legal government can return. They have the job --

MR. HUNT: Which is really what they were trying to do in Lebanon --

SEC. PERRY: They have the job of nation-building. We will participate with other international organizations in helping them in that nation-building.

MR. HUNT: But wasn't that precisely what we said in Somalia and to a somewhat different degree what we said in Lebanon back in the early '80s?

SEC. PERRY: I think the situation is quite different here. There is a legal government going back in. We're not trying to create the government. There are parliamentary elections coming up in just a few months. Our job is not to determine the

parliament as to create an environment in which free and fair elections can be conducted.

MR. HUNT: Were you disappointed that the leader of that elected government, Father Aristide, had such a cool reception the first couple of days to what we had done in Haiti?

SEC. PERRY: I don't know what reception he had the first couple of days. I read what the press opined that he had the first couple of days. The first I had of concrete and explicit feedback from President Aristide when he came to the Pentagon on Wednesday. And he was very positive and very outgoing at that time.

MR. HUNT: But the fact that he didn't say anything and that all of his American lawyers -- his lawyers and public relations advisors were saying this was not a very good deal, didn't that tell you something?

SEC. PERRY: I thought it was worth waiting to hear what he had to say himself, and we heard that on Wednesday.

MR. HUNT: Finally, you said yesterday, I believe, that Father Aristide would return sometime after October 15th. Is this -- is the timetable slipping?

SEC. PERRY: No. October 15th, October 16th. I think he is coming the day after -- not a week or a month after. But, again, that's for him to decide, not for me to decide. I was just repeating what he told us in the Pentagon, that he's going to come as soon as he can. And I would interpret that to be the day after.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Secretary, when you were on this program several months ago, we talked about Korea. And you said, if the status quo remained, by the end of this year our policy would not have succeeded. The Koreans still have a nuclear bomb. The Koreans still deny us inspections to their sites. What is going to happen?

SEC. PERRY: We have not resolved our problems with North Korea yet. But since that interview we had last spring, we've made substantial progress. I'm not complacent about the situation in North Korea by any means. I'm still very much concerned about it. I place that right up there at the very top of our priority interests in security. But we have made substantial progress. We have now an acceptance by the North Koreans of the willingness to stop that program. And what we are now negotiating with them is the deal by which they will stop it. As you know, that deal involves providing them with an electric power

reactor. Whether we'll be able to consummate that deal is the question at this point.

MR. RUSSERT: But we will insist on full inspection before we give them any power generator?

SEC. PERRY: Any arrangement that we make with the North Koreans and any fulfilling our side of it by giving them the reactor will require full verification that they are complying with their terms. Absolutely.

MR. RUSSERT: The rods that could be reprocessed, where are they now and what is our timetable before they become --

SEC. PERRY: The rods in cooling ponds in Yongbyon, in storage you might say. And something has to be done with them.

MR. RUSSERT: By when?

SEC. PERRY: In the few months ahead. Something will have to be done. And they either will be reprocessed, they will be, as they say, canned -- put in a permanent storage provision, or they will be shipped out of the country. And, again, that is one of the issues which we are debating with the North Koreans.

MR. RUSSERT: And if none of those things happen, what then?

SEC. PERRY: Well, one of those things -- physically, one of those things will have to happen, and the one we don't want to happen is the reprocessing.

MR. RUSSERT: And if that occurs?

SEC. PERRY: If they reprocess and now end up with weapons-grade plutonium to get four or five bombs, we will consider that -- well, there's a variation there. If they reprocess and get the plutonium, there's still a question of what they do with the plutonium. But that is -- what we are trying to do is prevent them from getting that weapons-grade plutonium from the spent fuel which is now in the storage pond. A crucial part of our policy at this point is to prevent that from happening.

MR. RUSSERT: And if they do it, what are the consequences?

SEC. PERRY: If they do it, then we are back, in a sense, to where we were before, being confronted with the threat of a North Korean nuclear weapon program. And then we are back to a coercive diplomacy with all of its consequences. And a coercive diplomacy means the threat of military power, in addition to diplomacy.

MR. RUSSERT: Bosnia -- after the airstrikes of

last week, the Serbs are now strangling Sarajevo, closed the airport. The water supply, the food supply are in jeopardy. Not allowing rescue workers to get to people in need. We have set a deadline of October 15th for the Serbs to accept the peace plan. If they have not by October 15th, how will we avoid the strangling of Sarajevo, and will we begin to arm the Muslims?

SEC. PERRY: There's a lot thrown into that -- those questions all at once. Let me try to factor them and take them a piece at a time.

The first issue is whether or not we can -- let me go back to your October the 15th date. The October the 15th date is the date by which we are going to the United Nations and propose a multilateral lifting of the embargo. If the United Nations does not approve that multilateral lifting, then the president has committed to then go consult with the Congress about a unilateral lifting. The problem with a unilateral lifting of the embargo, which we stated before and I'll state again, is that it probably widens the war in Bosnia even more than it is now, probably leads to more casualties and more violence. We will try to avoid that if we can, but there are several alternative ways that can be avoided. One of them is getting the multilateral lifting of the embargo. The other is getting the Bosnian Serbs to accept the peace plan. We have to put more pressure on the Bosnian Serbs for that to happen.

MR. RUSSERT: Pressure -- will there be more airstrikes between now and October 15th?

SEC. PERRY: There may very well be more airstrikes between now and the 15th. That is the one form of pressure which is available to us, one form of military pressure that's available to us.

MR. RUSSERT: Secretary of Defense William Perry, we thank you for joining us on Meet the Press.

SEC. PERRY: Thank you.